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# HOWARD CAMPBELL



BY McEWAN LAWSON

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## HOWARD CAMPBELL

HE stayed with my people when I was about seventeen. He preached on the Sunday, but I cannot remember what he preached about. Just at that time I was passing through an April period of existence, and, for three hours a day, heavy clouds of agnosticism swathed me, whilst, at other times, there were what might be described as fair and even dazzling intervals. Curiously enough it was in Church that my most thunderous moments came. Outside in the fields I found I believed in God and Christ, but, inside a church, with a collection of people looking good, singing hymns, and with some dressed in frock coats, which always seemed to me then the mark of a closed mind (there is no accounting for prejudice), I used to feel the

mood of blank, dumb atheism closing around me. Instead of worshipping, I was filled with a desire to seize some intellectual scythe and to mow down by their legs all the Christian corn standing in the pews. I expect I must have been in that mood on the morning that Howard Campbell preached. Dimly I seem to recall something about thousands of villages full of wretched people living on the border-land of starvation, ignorant and ground-down, serfs really, living miserably and dying in ugly ways, amid dirt and dust, upon practically treeless plains, under a pitiless sky. It only confirmed and deepened my agnostic mood. Of the actual sermon I can only recall the vaguest outline, but three quite strong impressions of the visit remain in my mind. I helped him with his bag to the station on the Monday morning. Normally, I disliked very much to be seen in company with a parson, especially one with a dog collar. I used to think that passers-by would either suppose that he was taking me for a walk to do me good, or that I believed, what in my pride and ignorance, I imagined that he believed. The first

impression I recall of Campbell was that, instead of feeling at all awkward in his company, exactly the reverse was the case. I felt it an honour to carry his bag. He wore no dog collar. He walked by my side, a weather-beaten wiry little man, of the stuff that explorers are made of. The next impression, which remains as though it had happened yesterday, recalls a dreary booking-office at a suburban station four miles out of Manchester, an impersonal place, with an empty firegrate, a picture of the bow of a Cunard liner ploughing the Atlantic, some fluttering handbills in yellow and green about railway excursions, and a dusty wooden floor. What I remember was Campbell finding an old disused railway ticket on the floor. It was to some outlandish place, and, as he was a collector of railway tickets, he put the little green thing in the flap of his pocket-book, and fell to talking about railway tickets, and postage stamps, for he was an eager collector of these as well. The last thing I remember was a third class compartment on an afternoon suburban train, filled with clerks recovering from dinner behind newspapers,

and Campbell telling me that the world was a desperate place, unless there were some other meaning to it than the visible one of millions toiling day by day that they might live, feed and clothe themselves, and eat and laugh until they took ill and died. He made me feel the need of the world—and he set me thinking. Either Christ's message was false or true. If it were false, the world had nothing. If it were true, it was The Thing worth teaching, the Greatest Thing in the World—and the greatest service one could render to the world was, either to be a minister, and to help to clear the fog at home, or to be a missionary, and to go out to those folk whose need was like a cry in the night.

Howard Campbell, of Scots origin and reared in Ireland, was a man. Robin Hood would have been glad to have him, and Francis Drake would have given him a ship. There are some who remind one of a cushion, and some are sleek and set one thinking of silken ringlets, Campbell bristled. There was a flash of steel about him. We need several thousand Christian troopers of his mould.

They exist. You may be one. You may have been looking at Churches, and Sunday Schools, and Missions, and saying under your breath, "I do not belong to this lot." Quite likely you have been saying, "Thank God, I do not belong to this lot." John Bunyan speaks with regret of a young woman whose name was Dull. We all know her, and, possibly also, her revered parents, and her brothers. They are country lanes turned into asphalt suburban streets. But God wants women like splendid Margaret Blagg, who at the court of Charles II, of all places, "made virtue a cheerful thing, lovely as herself," and men like Honest in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, whom Captain Greatheart, described as "a cock of the right kind." Campbell was that. The gods at Edinburgh University are the first Rugby fifteen. Campbell, of medium height but powerfully built and very fast, was amongst the gods. The magazine of Foyle College, Londonderry, under the heading of "The Bringing of the First Football Cup to Derry" has a good picture of him:

"The most interesting part of the match was the last score, which was not obtained till

minutes after time was up! Present-day footballers hardly know what a maul in goal is. At that time when a player carried a ball over the goal line the ball did not become dead if the player was tackled. If he was able to wrest the ball completely from his tacklers and touch in on the ground he could claim a try. W. H. Campbell (father of S. S. B. Campbell, of Foyle and International fame) got over the line in the very last minute of the match with three Portadown men hanging on to him. He was determined to score and the Portadown men were just as determined not to let him. They wrestled for that ball for ten long minutes, when Campbell triumphantly captured it from all three, touched it down, claimed a try and got it. The referee, or rather umpire, as there was no referee then, could not call "no side" until the ball was dead, and at that time it could not be dead until either a try or a touch-down was got, or Campbell was pulled back into the field of play. The excitement during the maul-in-goal was very intense, although the result of the match did not depend on what happened, as we had scored a goal and two

trles and time was up. The team, spectators, and umpires gathered round those wrestlers, and the hard set face of Campbell as he lay on his back with those three men on top of him comes as vividly before me now as if it only happened a week ago. They dare not let the ball go. Anyone who did had to give up his part in the maul. One by one the Portadown men's hold on the ball was loosened by Campbell till he had only one opponent—a big policeman. A final wriggle and a pull and the ball was planted on the ground, and we cheered as if it had been our first try instead of our fourth. Thus was the cup 'lifted'."

It is not usual for queues of officers and men to line up for the Sunday service in the liner's saloon, but when Campbell took it there were a surprising number there. The explanation lay in some boxing proceedings on the after deck on the evening of the sports' day, when the burly mate had met his match. Out East some Indians must still be telling of a lonely white man they saw, in the midst of the jungle, spending half-an-hour every morning for a

week, bowling a red leather ball at two walking sticks, set near the tent canvas. Perhaps, they thought of it as some new form of penance, some unusual method of breaking away from the wheel of life. But it was Campbell practising for a match between Engineers and Doctors. They always smuggled him into civilian teams, and, if he were free, neither temperature, nor flooded river, nor night travel, nor distance, could keep him back. The old pictures of missionaries used to show them, (no one probably was so angry at the cartoon as the missionary), standing under a tree dressed in black, and with black gloves, finger-ing a Bible. Campbell carried his Bible. It was his compass. But he did not wave his compass about. He kept it in his pocket and showed its directions in his manner of travel-ling. What he did wave about was a butterfly net, and, instead of standing under a tree, he was as often climbing one to examine a strange nest. Birds, flowers, postage stamps (he would spend three days on a holiday working through old envelopes in a merchant's house in the bazaar on the track of rare stamps), fossils,

stone implements, and, above all, moths and butterflies, of which he added seventy new species to the collection in the British Museum. And how he trudged, mile after mile, through heat which few could bear, caring for needy folk in a thousand scattered villages! Yes, Campbell was a man.

He lived to serve the poor, the lost, and the outcast. The Cuddapah district of South India has a few hills and some forests, but, in the main, it is a vast, sun-baked monotonous plain filled with a thousand villages of huddled mud huts. There are a few wealthy landowners, but most of the people belong to the lowest caste of Indian social order, and the majority are beyond the pale of the lowest caste. They are really serfs, and weave coarse cloth, and bend as labourers over the fields, ever looking with apprehension over their shoulders, for the ruler of the plains is Want, and its lieutenants are Oppression and Famine. For seventeen years, Campbell moved among these people as a Saint Andrew, a Saint Patrick, and a Saint George all rolled into one. His day began early, generally before dawn, and, as he stepped

out of his tent, there was quite often some poor wretch, who, because of bad crops, had mortgaged cottage and plough to a money-lender, or who had been sold seed with mildew in it, or, who had been cheated out of his little bit of inherited land by a clever but unbrotherly elder brother. Campbell rode no splendid white charger, he tramped along on foot, or rode in a rickety, jolting bullock wagon, but he was Saint George to these poor souls, and, after hearing their case, would fight their battle for them at the local court, and, with his intimate knowledge of Indian custom and village law, his brilliant knowledge of the language, his Scots thoroughness and Irish wit, would win it for them too. He would reach a village just as the labourers were setting out for the fields. That was when the Saint Patrick came into action, for, by the well-head, or at the village gate, with the hot sun rising in the East, he would tell of One, who in the Love of God, could bring inward balm to the hardest labour, and carry both the burden and the burdened. No one can ever measure what this meant to many a tired harassed man or

woman, with sickness at home, and the wearing toil of precarious labour on that grey plain. Sufficient is it to state that in the ten years from 1890—1900, Campbell and his colleagues saw no less than ten thousand outcasts choose Christ as their Friend and Lord. On the edge of the crowd there would be a man turning blind, and another asking Campbell to come and see if he could do anything for his little child dying of fever, and Campbell would write the address of an eye hospital and a note of introduction to the surgeon, and go away with the father to the ailing child, for he was doctor as well as herald. Then, with the child sleeping at last with a falling temperature, he would go to the little Christian chapel up its side street, with its lowly roof and mud floor, and hold a service with his fellow Christians there, cheering on the lonely native evangelist and teacher, examining the school children, and helping all and sundry in their troubles. In the course of a morning, between five o'clock and eleven he might visit three or four villages in this way. By eleven the heat, which rose from 105 degrees to 120 degrees, would drive

him to his tent. After a meal he would rest for a little, but only for a little. Whilst all the plain dozed in the afternoon heat, Campbell would be standing by a high desk, reading a book of philosophy or theology from home, or at translation work. In the evening, he would be back in his villages, and, when the sun had set, and dark-winged night had spread its pinions wide across the sleeping plain, Campbell—and here is the Saint Andrew—would be walking, to and fro, by his tent door, with his arm over the shoulder of some poor soul whose home was hell or whose heart was hell. In famine, he was wonderful, and, in plague, he never shirked but went wherever need was greatest. Intolerable heat in the dry season, with wind like the breath from an oven door, and in the rains, axles deep in mud, or flooded streams, would never keep him back from answering the call for help. There are better known names in India than that of Howard Campbell, names which appear in British newspapers, and receive honourable mention in Government despatches, but Campbell's name is held as the most precious

treasure in thousands of mud cottages, and in ten thousand outcast hearts. If that be not reward, tell me what is?

He gave his life for India. He was as good a scholar and thinker, as he was a good Rugby player, or a "bonny fighter" for the oppressed. His faith had not come to him easily. He was not one of those fortunate, or unfortunate, ones who seem to be born by the blue lagoon of easy faith, and always sit under its palm trees, or paddle comfortably over its lapping waters, untouched by the waves of the great sea of life. It is doubtful whether such a soul ever exists. The night, the storm, and the wind is what we know, and Campbell knew it too. His face was lined like the face of a sailor, and his books, written in Telugu, and dealing with life and its problems and solutions, have touched an answering chord in thousands of minds seeking to find, not the easy short-cut, but the real key to the meaning of this strange world in which we live.

After seventeen years of work in the villages, he was moved, much against his will, to the headship of a training college for Indian

ministers and teachers at Gooty. He proved a rare head. From an average of 150 men, a good cricket team could be drawn, and, on the cricket field there was neither Brahmin nor outcast, but just one team. News came one morning that a crack was appearing in the bank of the great reservoir. From morning until night Campbell and his students worked at the threatened bank, saved the situation, and earned the thanks of the Government. There was nothing weak about him. He was like Father O'Flynn, and on occasion he could help a lazy one on with the stick, but he was a great human, gay and humorous, tender and strong. He could detect the rascal, and deal with him, but, then, if the rascal were down with fever, Campbell would sit up all night with him.

He had a great career opening before him as a College principal, for they had invited him to be head of a new and important college then to be opened at Bangalore, when he took ill. It must have been coming on for some time. In his furlough home in 1904 he was ill, but back he went to India to his college

work. He was Cyrano de Bergerac fighting his last fight, and he saw the face of the other swordsman, but submit, not he. In September, 1908, they brought him back to England but he had caught "sprue." He had to lie flat on his back, but that did not prevent him from reading Greek plays, nor, when his eyes grew tired, from practising Hindustani, which he was learning, with the Lascar sailor in the next bed. They moved him to Bordighera, in Italy, for the winter, but he passed onward in the February, planning to be back in India by the Spring, and wanting recruits to sail with him. The villages, the cottages, the sick folk and the students, were waiting for him. The whole land was calling him.

There is no greater life a man can live than a life like that of Howard Campbell. He did not play with the fringes of life, he went to the heart of the world's need. For twenty-six years he served India and his soul was content. And when he came, as we all shall do one day, to the last hour, he could lie down content, knowing he had answered an inward voice and done the hard great thing. When

we come to die, if we can say that we have lifted a cup of cold water to the lips of humanity, we can shake hands with Death on honourable terms, for Life will not have cheated us into the second-rate. So, as you hear the call, answer it!

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